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ABSTRACT

This study supports the hypothesis that educated white listeners react negatively to the phonological variations of non-standard English. White college freshmen and seniors listened to a recorded tape of ten speakers, black and white with standard and non-standard styles of pronunciation, all reading the same passage. Students were asked to judge on phonological variations alone ten characteristics as well as the races and probable occupations of the speakers. Although all the speakers were educated, half, both black and white, spoke with a non-standard southern style of pronunciation. Non-standard speakers of both races were rated significantly lower overall on the characteristics than their Standard speaking counterparts. However, stereotypes included higher ratings on friendliness and honesty. Non-standard speakers were also perceived as black members of the working or lower classes, and Standard speakers were perceived as being white professionals. The situations observed in conducting such a study were as revealing as the statistical findings of the study itself: the typical reactions of southern speakers to the suggestion that they had such a speech style, the hesitancy in reading of all black speakers, the minor differences in perception between the freshmen and the seniors, and the reactions of the college students when confronted with their stereotypes. (Author)

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REACTIONS OF PROSPECTIVE ENGLISH TEACHERS TOWARD SPEAKERS OF A NON-STANDARD DIALECT

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This study supports the hypothesis that prospective English teachers have unfavorable stereotypes of speakers of non-standard English dialects. Subjects listened to a recorded tape of black and white speakers with standard and non-standard styles of pronunciation. Subjects were asked to judge solely on phonological variation certain personality characteristics, the races, and probable occupations of the speakers.

INTRODUCTION

Many well-intentioned teachers may have attitudes toward speakers of a non-standard dialect of English which they need to examine.[1] The purpose of this paper is to show that educated people are frequently not aware of their unfavorable stereotyping of people from other regions, social classes, or social groups. Judith Guskin recently examined the attitudes of black and white teachers toward children whose language reflected different racial and social backgrounds (Guskin, 1970). She found that such teachers tended to stereotype children solely on the basis of their speech characteristics.

Most people who have studied linguistics are usually struck by the disparity which exists between popular conceptions of language and a more scholarly view. Although we are beginning to see the mark of the linguist on the curriculum

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[1] In this paper "standard dialect" refers to the structure and phonology used on the national radio and television networks. All other varieties of English are "non-standard," including the variety often referred to as "educated Southern speech."

in our school systems, and although many of our college and universities are turning out English teachers who have had some exposure to linguistics, we still have a long way to go in providing the majority of our teachers with an adequate understanding of the relationships between language and culture and between language and self-identity. As long as educated people continue to parody the dialects of those who speak differently from themselves, school systems are not doing an adequate job either in teaching the nature of language or in conveying appropriate attitudes toward language differences.

A teacher who reacts negatively to the speech of non-standard speakers is also reacting negatively toward the speakers themselves, because language expresses identity. Students who feel that their main expression of identity has little worth in the eyes of others must suffer some psychological damage. Unfortunately, any comfort a student might take from the solidarity with his like-minded peers is diminished when he must regard his own dialect as inadequate and inferior.

The literature contains many reports of the feelings of inferiority of non-standard speakers. In his now famous study of spoken English in New York City, Labov (1966) found that the people who used certain forms were the most sensitive to the stigma attached to these forms. In another study, he found that non-standard speakers were willing to judge other non-standard speakers as unemployable or nearly so. (Labov, 1965).

That language differences are significant to children is apparent when we examine the cartoons shown on television. The speech styles of the heroes, the stupid characters, the funny characters, and the villians are usually recognizable attempts at imitating regional or social dialects. It may even be the case that when a ghetto child begins school he is so aware that his language differs from the standard that he is intimidated by any kind of language activity. This awareness is contrary to what some sociolinguists have stated about puberty being the age of awareness for the social significance of language differences; however, in an experiment with fifth and sixth graders, E. Bouchard Ryan showed that children perceive the social consequences of dialect differences (Bouchard Ryan, 1969).

W. E. Lambert developed a matched-guise technique to investigate the stereotyped responses of bilingual listeners to bilingual English Canadian and French Canadian speakers. The listeners were unaware that they were judging the same people, who first spoke one language and then the other (Lambert, 1967). Lambert's study revealed that the French Canadian judges rated speakers higher on the personality rating tests in their English guises than in their French guises. Thus, the experiment revealed the inferiority felt by certain French Canadians.

Tucker and Lambert modified this technique to study the reactions that southern black college students and southern

white college students had toward white and black speakers of various dialects (Lambert, 1968). They found that southern black college students have more favorable impressions of those who speak in the standard educated northern dialect than in their own dialect. However, they rated their own dialect even higher than the dialect of educated white southerners. Such knowledge might be very important in choosing an English teacher for comparable black students.

The following experiment was designed as an extension of Tucker and Lambert's study on the arousal of stereotypes by dialect differences. The purpose of the experiment was to determine if prospective teachers in special language classes had unfavorable stereotypes of speakers of non-standard dialects of English.

EXPERIMENT

Subjects

The subjects were twenty-four white college seniors at the University of Michigan who planned to be certified to teach English. They were in two classes of fourteen and ten members each in a special introductory course to modern English. Because they were from the same populations, their scores were averaged together to represent a group response.[2]

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[2]A control group of white freshmen English students also participated in the experiment. Their responses were consistent with those of the prospective teachers, indicating that educated white people in general may respond unfavorably to non-standard dialect speakers.

Procedure.

The subjects were asked to listen to a tape of ten speakers reading the same passage. Speakers were both blacks and whites. They spoke both standard and non-standard dialects. Because it was desirable to obtain the subjects' reactions only to phonological variants, all of the voices had to be those of educated speakers.

To maintain a lower number of variables and to further aid in providing the most potentially favorable listener reactions, only female speakers were used, Lambert having shown that subjects generally respond more favorably to females (Lambert, 1967).

The order, race, and occupation of speakers on the tape was as follows:

practice voice
#1 black standard, professional counselor
#2 black non-standard, college student
#3 white standard, college instructor
#4 black non-standard, receptionist-secretary
#5 black standard, receptionist-secretary
#6 white non-standard, college professor
#7 white non-standard, college professor (same speaker as #6)
#8 black non-standard, college student (pre-law)
#9 white standard, secretary (B.A. in Philosophy)
#10 white non-standard, librarian

Each speaker read the passage twice with a five second pause between the readings. A fifteen second pause followed between speakers.

The following passage was written to elicit phonological variations of post-vocalic r and l, [-ɪŋ], final nasals, final stops, and final fricatives.

> Mother calls us to Thanksgiving dinner with a bell. Everytime it happens, everyone starts laughing and then listening to hear it again. Even Rover knows it is almost time for us to eat. He doesn't do anything but lick his chops greedily. With pleasure all of us sit down and help ourselves at last to turkey dinner with all the trimmings.

Subjects were given a personality rating test to do which required them to judge each speaker on ten characteristics: ambition, character, determination, education, friendliness, honesty, intelligence, personality, speaking ability, and upbringing. Many of these characteristics are identical with those used in Lambert's experiment (Lambert, 1968). Lambert's list itself was the result of previous work with college students.

On the personality rating test each of the ten nouns was followed by a rating scale from 1 to 8 with "one" representing the "least" evidence of such a characteristic and "eight" representing the "most." Three differently ordered noun lists were used.

The personality rating tests were passed out, each subject receiving a different test form from his neighbor. Subjects were told to circle a number between 1 or 8 on the rating scale beside each noun, indicating to what degree the speaker on the tape indicated that he possessed the named characteristic.

Subjects were told a cover story, being reminded of their experiences with guessing at a person's personality characteristics from talking to him on the telephone or

listening to him on the radio. Then the practice voice was played while the students marked. Procedural questions were then answered. Purpose-oriented questions were deferred until after the experiment when students were promised some feedback on the voices (following Lambert, 1967).

After all ten voices had been played, the personality rating tests were collected, and the subjects were given a separate sheet for marking the race and occupation of each speaker. Subjects were given white, black or other as possible choices. The occupational choices named were cleaning lady, salesgirl, secretary, housewife, teacher, and doctor. Subjects were told to circle one race and one suitable occupation for each speaker. The recorded passages were played again, but only once for each speaker, since they were now familiar to the subjects.

After these sheets were collected, questions were answered regarding the nature of the test. A brief sample from each reading was also played and the subjects were told the sex and occupation for that speaker. Thus, the previously promised feedback was provided.

Results.

The results of the personality rating test are summarized in Tables 1a and 1b. Actual mean ratings appear in Table 1a, and the rankings of the means appear in Table 1b. These tables represent the mean ratings over all subjects for each attribute and for each dialect (following Lambert, 1967).

The Friedman Test (Steel and Torrie, 1960), was used to determine whether the speakers of the various dialects were systematically rated differently. The results were significant at the ~~.05~~ .025 level. Subjects rated white speakers of the standard dialect significantly higher than speakers of either the black or white non-standard dialects.

An examination of Table 2 reveals the percentage of prospective teachers choosing a particular race for each dialect group to which they listened. Subjects almost unanimously perceived the standard speakers as white and the black non-standard speakers as black. They were also able to identify the white non-standard speakers as white.

An examination of Table 3 indicates that the percentage of subjects choosing a particular occupation for each group is consistent with stereotypes shown for each group on the questions concerning personality and race.

DISCUSSION

The making of the dialect tape provided additional confirmation of the unfavorable stereotype which many educated people hold toward non-standard dialect speakers. Those whites and blacks with the standard dialects were flattered by the request to use their voices and were very cooperative, showing a great interest in knowing the details of the experiment; on the other hand, those speakers, white and black, with non-standard dialects became increasingly sensitive and reluctant to participate, in proportion to

the amount of information told them about the nature of the experiment. As a consequence those solicited last were told the least in order to gain cooperation.

Most non-standard speakers expressed their distaste for southern-style speech. Both southern whites read the passage with a substantial decrease in the southern forms of their casual speech. When one was asked if she could read it again more casually, sounding more southern, she declined saying, " [ɪət wəd ǰɪs bɪ tuu feək] ." When the other southern speaker was approached to do the tape she disclaimed having " any accent anymore, but if you still want me, I will do it anyway." This speaker did comply reluctantly with the request to "ham it up" on a second reading, and both styles were used in the experiment, accounting for the three white southern voices possessed by two speakers.

The first black non-standard speaker was initially apprehensive about the situation. She was told about the nature of the experiment in detail, and consequently became so anxious that she was unable to give her best performance. She read very quickly and left the room immediately upon finishing. During the course of her interview, when she apparently thought black speech or her speech was being made equivalent to southern speech, she replied sharply, "I just hate southern accents." This reaction confirms the sensitivity of ghetto blacks to southern speech noticed by J.J. Hartman and A.A. Guiora in their case study in black dialect, "Talkin' Like the Man."

Another observation is that all the blacks, both standard and non-standard speakers, showed considerable anxiety prior to and during the act of reading the passage. Several practiced reading it a number of times before recording, and several expressed their fears over not being able to read it well.

The reactions of the subjects to the experiment provide some insights not apparent from an examination of the test results. Most of the subjects who gave any reaction to the experiment gave a negative one, especially for having to judge certain characteristics such as honesty, determination or ambition solely by the speaker's voice; however, no one said it was an impossible task. After the experiment was concluded and it became apparent that subjects had been responding to their stereotypes, one student said she was "put off" by such tests. Several seemed quite uncomfortable about having perceived the black standard speakers as white and the black non-standard speakers as salesgirls or cleaning ladies. In contrast to the reactions of these college students, E. Bouchard Ryan reports that fifth and sixth graders thought of this type of experiment as a "fun game," and gave evidence of enjoying it. (Bouchard Ryan, 1970).

The results show even though the subjects were disturbed and were aware of what they were doing, they were still willing to rate the standard speakers consistently high and non-standard speakers consistently low on <u>education</u>, <u>intelligence</u>, <u>upbringing</u>, and <u>speaking ability</u>.

A ranking of the characteristics (and not the dialects) to determine the two highest and two lowest ranks given by the students, reveals that standard speakers were ranked highest on education and lowest on personality. Non-standard speakers were ranked high on honesty and low on speaking ability. Thus, the interesting stereotypes emerge of the dull intellectual standard speaker and the honest but inarticulate non-standard speaker.

We must note that the black standard speakers read with great precision and care in articulation. This precision and care seem to be reflected in their receiving high ratings in education, upbringing, intelligence, and speaking ability, while at the same time scoring low on personality and friendliness.

The fact that the subjects perceived these black standard speakers as white confirms the stereotype of standard dialect speakers being white. Apparently, though, the stereotype of non-standard speakers being black was not strong, since only 20% of the subjects identified the white non-standard speakers as black.

Examining the probable occupations reveals further stereotyping. Although over 1/3 of the black standard speakers, over 1/4 of the white standard speakers, and 1/5 of the white non-standard speakers were stereotyped as teachers, no subjects chose black non-standard speakers for that profession. (Two of the three were college students, one being in pre-law.)

Many people may be surprised that educated people were even willing to attempt to judge a speaker's personality solely by his pronunciation; however, there is some comfort in knowing there were a few who were disturbed about doing this. Furthermore, it is even more discouraging to consider that although only phonology was used for these judgments, many studies show that there is even less tolerance for non-standard grammatical structures and lexical variations. We can imagine what difficulties non-standard speakers face, whose grammatical structures and lexicon differ from the standard as well.

The student who daily encounters such difficulties is truly the victim of stereotyping, but lest we prematurely condemn the stereotyping process, we must briefly examine what a stereotype is, for what it is useful, and for what it is not useful.

A stereotype results from our attempts to categorize the world around us. It is often a useful short-cut in the thinking process and often accurate as a generalization.

If we know for certain that Mitch is a six-year old boy living in Watts, we might know much more about him. He is probably black, poor, speaks a non-standard dialect of English and is having difficulty learning to read. In his class at school there are probably 25 or 30 other youngsters to whom we might also wish to apply this stereotype, but to say what motivates any one child, or how any specific child will fare in the future is sheer folly based on our stereotype.

Not only must we examine the validity of our uses of the stereotype, but we must try to understand why these stereo- exist, why children living in Watts, Harlem, or many other places we could name are probably black and probably having difficulty learning to read.

Teachers must be made aware that they may have unfounded stereotypes of non-standard dialect speakers which reveal prejudice and are potentially harmful for our children, schools and society.

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TABLE 1a

MEAN RATINGS OF EACH DIALECT GROUP
FOR EACH NOUN

		BLACK[3] STANDARD	WHITE STANDARD	BLACK NON-STANDARD	WHITE NON-STANDARD
1.	Education	6.2	6.4	4.7	5.2
2.	Determination	4.8	5.5	4.8	4.7
3.	Personality	4.6	5.1	5.0	5.8
4.	Character	5.1	5.5	5.1	5.6
5.	Ambition	4.6	5.5	4.7	5.3
6.	Intelligence	5.9	6.1	5.3	5.4
7.	Honesty	5.7	5.6	5.2	5.7
8.	Upbringing	6.1	6.2	4.6	5.3
9.	Speaking Ability	5.4	5.7	4.0	5.1
10.	Friendliness	4.3	5.0	5.0	5.7
	Totals	52.7	56.6	48.4	53.8

TABLE 1b

RANKS OF MEANS OF EACH DIALECT GROUP
FOR EACH NOUN

		BLACK STANDARD	WHITE STANDARD	BLACK NON-STANDARD	WHITE NON-STANDARD
1.	Education	2	1	4	3
2.	Determination	2.5	1	2.5	4
3.	Personality	4	2	3	1
4.	Character	3.5	2	3.5	1
5.	Ambition	4	1	3	2
6.	Intelligence	2	1	4	3
7.	Honesty	1.5	3	4	1.5
8.	Upbringing	2	1	4	3
9.	Speaking Ability	2	1	4	3
10.	Friendliness	4	2.5	2.5	1
	Totals	27.5	15.5	34.5	22.5

$\chi^2 = 10.8$ $p < .025$ with $df=3$

[3]The term "black standard" refers to black speakers using the standard dialect, not any sort of black standard dialect. This system of terminology applies to the other groups as well.

TABLE 2

THE PERCENTAGE OF SUBJECTS
CHOOSING A PARTICULAR RACE
FOR EACH DIALECT GROUP

	BLACK STANDARD	WHITE STANDARD	BLACK NON-STANDARD	WHITE NON-STANDARD
1. WHITE	94.0	100	3.5	80.5
2. BLACK	4.3	0	94.0	18.8
3. OTHER	1.8*	0	2.5	0*

TABLE 3

THE PERCENTAGE OF SUBJECTS
CHOOSING A PROBABLE OCCUPATION
FOR EACH DIALECT GROUP

	BLACK STANDARD	WHITE STANDARD	BLACK NON-STANDARD	WHITE NON-STANDARD
1. Cleaning lady	6.8	0	9.7	4.6
2. Salesgirl	2.5	7.5	57.0	25.6
3. Secretary	13.9	43.9	16.1	17.2
4. Housewife	33.9	21.4	17.1	32.9
5. Teacher	36.8	25.5*	0	19.7
6. Doctor	6.1	1.8	0	0

*Totals may not exactly equal 100% due to rounding errors.